Annual Report 2025-26



YouthLaw Aotearoa

Our Vision

A fair and just Aotearoa where children and young people's rights are respected and their voices heard.



The YouthLaw team at Papakura Marae with tikanga and te reo educator Max Matenga (left).

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Co-Chair Report

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.
In this annual report, we not only reflect on the progress and many achievements of the past year, but look back even further, as YouthLaw Aotearoa turned forty in 2026. Any fortieth is a big deal, but this milestone feels even more significant given YouthLaw was not expected to be around this long. It was originally given the name YouthLaw Project, as it was seen as a pilot scheme. Yet, YouthLaw has gone from strength to strength, and we can probably now say we are now middle-aged.

We first want to acknowledge Robert Ludbrook, who was the driving force behind YouthLaw and sadly passed away in 2024. In 1986 Robert, an Auckland lawyer with a long-standing interest in providing legal services for disadvantaged groups in the community, had recently returned from working at the Children's Law Centre in the UK. He had lunch with Ted Jones, an Auckland City Youth Adviser, who had been pivotal in the establishment of the Auckland City Youth Resource Centre. At Ted's suggestion, Robert agreed to set up an office at the Youth Resource Centre to provide a free legal advice service for young people, initially for three afternoons a week on a trial basis.

It grew from there, and YouthLaw Project officially opened in 1987. Piers Davies came on board at this stage as Treasurer and remained a Board member until 2025.

It is remarkable to reflect on how YouthLaw has grown from a small volunteer project into a national Community Law Centre with a five-day advice line, extensive education outreach, online information, casework, and national advocacy for children and young people. This growth reflects the people who have been involved with YouthLaw over the decades. We've been fortunate to have had countless volunteers and staff who have brought so much passion and dedication to this kaupapa.

We're also grateful to have worked alongside many organisations and partners, all of whom, like us, want the best for rangatahi. YouthLaw has been in a number of different offices over the years, across central and South Auckland, where we are based today. While change is a constant, we have always been guided by a children's rights perspective.

The timeline on the following page highlights some key dates, but it's impossible to capture everything that has happened over the years. To read more about our history, our website has documents from our twentieth and thirtieth birthdays which give more detail. https://youthlaw.co.nz/about-youthlaw/governance/

Once again, we thank all our staff and many volunteers, including our fellow Board members, for their hard work and contribution over the past year. We are excited about what lies ahead for YouthLaw and continuing this important journey together.

Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua – "I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past."

Nive Sharat Chandran
and Harvena Cherrington





September 1986	YouthLaw idea conceived
November 1986	YouthLaw Project opens
7 March 1987	Official opening by Mayor Dame Cath Tizard
24 June 1988	Becomes an incorporated society, later a charity
1989	Funding and student involvement expand
October 1990	First paid employee
1992	Becomes a Community Law Centre
1993–1995	Bicultural commitment strengthened
1998	"Project" dropped from name
1999–2000	YouthLaw website launched
2024-2026	Waha programme developed



Left: Robert Ludbrook, the founder of YouthLaw. Robert, an Auckland lawyer, had a long-standing interest in providing legal services for disadvantaged groups in the community.

Photo credit: Stuff Limited

General Manager's Report 6

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua – "I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past."

As this year draws to a close, it is an opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved this year. The team has done an incredible job serving our community. Simply meeting our targets and maintaining our high standards is a tough enough job. On top of this, we launched Waha and our Kaupapa Māori initiatives this year. Thank you to Natalie Andrews, Velda Chan, Sarah Guy, Gretchen Carroll, Andrew Fermor, Cole Peters, Ryan Brown-Haysom, Lucy Massey, Eden Irvine, Tania Cooper, Moira Hintz, Amelia Campbell, Suivaaia Pritchard, Stevie Hoesel, Jennifer Braithwaite, and Antonia Lloyd.

With it being a 40th anniversary, it is also an opportunity to reflect on our whakakapa – on who we are – and look forward to the work that lies ahead. In doing this, what struck me was how our current priorities reflect the commitments made by the original founders all those years ago: an unwavering commitment to children's rights, and a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Our commitment to children's rights is undoubtably at the core of who we are. We are proud of the fact we were the first organisation in Aotearoa to adopt an unequivocal children's rights approach. We see this commitment today in the way we practice law, our legal education, and our law reform work. This commitment also sits at the heart of Waha, a project designed to help young people actively shape the future of Aotearoa.

Our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi was also there from the start. It was there in 1988 in our first constitution. In 1993, we committed to ensuring tangata whenua and tangata tiriti would have equal voice in shaping our future.

Our current kaupapa Māori initiative is a once in a generation opportunity fulfil this commitment. Sitting within a national pilot, it comes with a clear strategy and dedicated funding.

As we embark on the next stage of our journey, we do not know where we will end up. But what is clear is we must remain true to the two commitments made all those years ago. In Aoteaora, you cannot have children's rights if you do not also honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It is the Crown who went into partnership with Māori, and it is the Crown who has the duty to uphold its obligations to all children in Aotearoa – both Māori and non-Māori.

This vision for YouthLaw has been embraced by the entire team. Learning to live it will take time, but our hope is that in 2040 we can look back knowing that the decisions we make today, helped create a community were the rights of all tamariki and rangatahi are upheld their voices are heard.

Ngā mihi,
Darryn Aitchison



Legal Advice Team

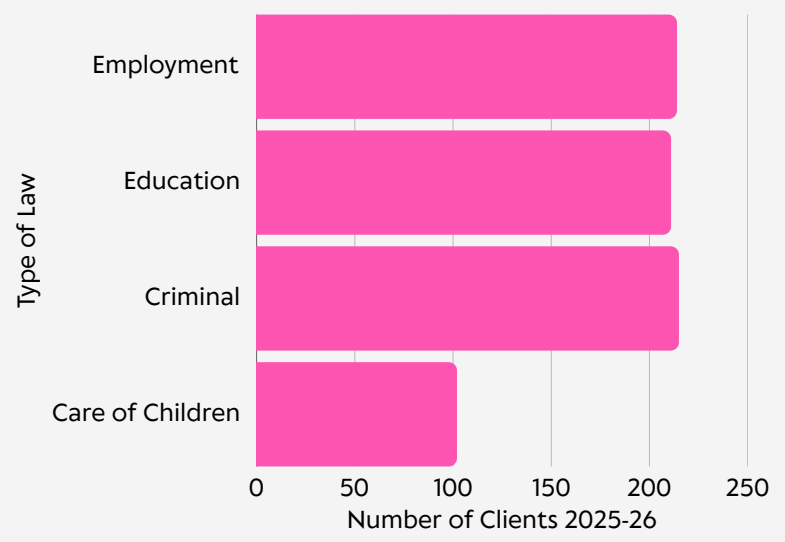
1,033

Clients in 2025-26, exceeding the Ministry of Justice annual target.

99%

Of clients said we helped them understand their legal options.

Top four legal issues by category



Feedback from clients

"Hi Cole, I just wanted to say thank you again for your time and guidance earlier. We really appreciate how clearly you explained everything - It has given us a much better understanding of what's happening and how to approach things moving forward."

"After being out of school since April this year, and a lot of back and forth with the Ministry, we finally have confirmed placement in a new school and the family is meeting with the school's guidance counsellor next week to discuss the best transition plan! The client was very pleased and thankful for YouthLaw's help."

"Thank you Ryan for taking the time to meet, talk, and also write this email to me to support/empower me to better support my father...the services have educated, empowered and better equipped me in navigating the legal system."

"Ryan has been absolutely amazing throughout this entire process. He has been clear and helpful in advising us and we really appreciate his assistance. We were mystified by all this prior to Ryan's help and he has been a godsend for us."

"Thank you very much for taking the time to speak with us and share your legal advice. Your clear guidance gave me great peace of mind and helped me understand the next steps. I truly appreciate your professionalism and support."



Left: Solicitor Cole Peters at The Front Door. YouthLaw has been part of The Front Door youth hub team for a couple of years. The Front Door is an early intervention and crisis centre, based in central Auckland, for rangatahi experiencing homelessness. One of the YL team is usually there once a week to talk to clients.

Legal Advice Volunteers

We were fortunate to have around 20 volunteers in each of the year's three intakes. The Legal Advice Team could not run the advice line without them. Every intake we're inundated with applications, and the volunteers who work with us are dedicated and enthusiastic. Many return for several intakes, with some working with the team for years!

We're delighted to have a volunteer relationship with The Malosi Project, which developed over 2025. The Malosi Project are University of Auckland Pacific law students dedicated to empowering Pacific youth to fight social injustice. Each intake we work together to ensure several of their members are volunteers with YouthLaw's Legal Advice Team.

Below: one of the volunteer inductions when we onboard the new volunteers.



Some of our volunteers' feedback:

"I want to say thank you to the whole team for the wonderful opportunity. I have learnt so many valuable things and it has been a pleasure working with you all. I genuinely enjoyed being a part of this space, and I pray that YouthLaw continues to thrive in the meaningful work that you all do for our communities," Leki.

"I can honestly say this was a transformative experience for me and highly rewarding! I love the work that YouthLaw does and helping people here has fulfilled me a lot!" Ruhamah.

"I have found it to be a very welcoming atmosphere with rewarding and interesting work. I will definitely recommend to other students that they volunteer with you," Elizabeth.

"I'm genuinely grateful for the opportunity to have volunteered and learned alongside the team. Thank you so much for all the support and guidance during my time here," Tanisha.

"My time here has helped me gain confidence in both my communication and written skills, which I know will benefit me in my legal career," Louise.

Law Reform

While it was a quieter year in terms of YouthLaw submissions, we did support several pieces of law reform work.

We were invited to provide input and feedback into the review and reissue of two education sector publications – the Ministry of Education's Standdown, Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion Guidelines (to be published), and the Privacy Commissioner's Education Privacy Guidelines: https://www.privacy.org.nz/resources-and-learning/a-z-topics/protecting-children-and-young-peoples-privacy/childrens-privacy-guidance-for-the-education-sector/.

We also contributed youth-specific insights to law reform submissions made by our peak body, Community Law Centres Aotearoa.

Education and Engagement Team 9

Our Education and Engagement Team, led by Sarah Guy, is always busy, visiting schools and community groups to host Law Related Education Sessions, as well as welcoming high school students at our offices.

This year, our Law Related Educator Sui Prichard designed and championed two Youth and Law workshop series for youth workers. The aim was to give them the confidence to identify and help rangatahi with legal issues in their day-to-day mahi. The sessions were presented by our solicitors and Education and Engagement Team, and we loved the discussion the participants created. We had a fantastic response and are looking to continue building legal capabilities for youth workers, who provide an invaluable position in the lives of rangitahi.

Sui left YouthLaw in June to have her second child, and we also farewelled Stevie Hoesel, our Community and Policy Advisor. Stevie is passionate about young people and worked closely with our Youth Project Team.

3,239

Participants in Law Related Education (LRE) sessions in 2025-26, exceeding the Ministry of Justice's annual target by more than 600.

99%

Of participants would recommend the session to friends or whānau. Ninety-five percent of participants surveyed report they found the LRE session improved their understanding of the topic

119

LRE sessions around the motu, in person and online.

Feedback from sessions

"We really appreciated your last session, and many participants found it very meaningful and relevant. We're looking forward to welcoming you back,"
Japan Kauri Education Trust.

"She's [Sarah Guy] relatable and her content very relevant for me. I wish she'd spoken for longer,"
Participant at the Legalwise seminar



Left: Participants in the second series of Youth and Law workshops with YL staff.

The Waha Programme

A major highlight of the year was launching our civics education programme, Waha. Created alongside youth, teachers, and legal experts, Waha empowers students to see themselves as capable of making positive change in their communities. The modular programme comprises lessons and fun content, which can be used in different ways, giving teachers the flexibility to integrate Waha into any civics and citizenship programme.

We piloted Waha in five South Auckland schools in their year 9-10 classes during term two, and then rolled the programme out nationally. The team loved taking Waha into the pilot schools, and students were highly engaged. Mihi to all those who provided such valuable reciprocal learning.

"Most of the time, I felt left out of 'political things', but Waha made me feel heard and seen,"
a pilot school student.

As part of the launch, we held a Waha celebration event in April to thank everyone who contributed to the programme's development. It was particularly special to have former Children's Commissioner Dr Claire Achmad speak, along with several of the amazing young people who co-designed the programme (pictured below).

The Waha website went live then too, which explains the programme fully and has everything teachers need to run Waha in the classroom. Each of the three main lessons has a short video and a fun game (pictured below) for the teachers to use in the classroom. Visit www.waha.org.nz to find out more, and sign up for the Waha newsletter.

Looking ahead, we can't wait for Waha to continue unfolding, and engaging a depth of kōrero where young people are invested in their communities.





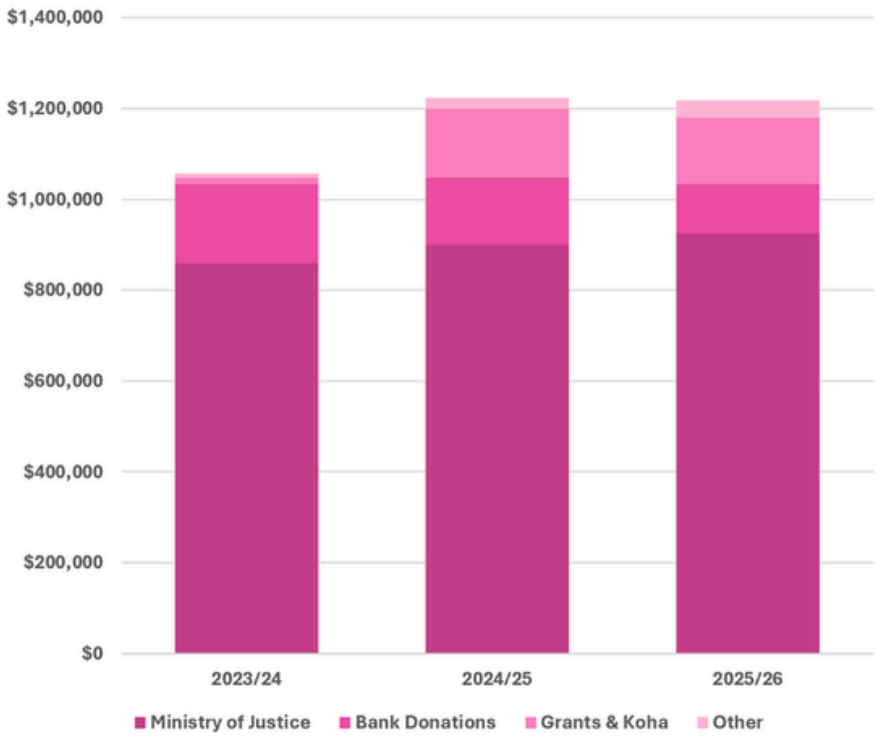


Finances

YouthLaw ended the 2025/26 financial year in a stable position with accumulated funds of $353,238. We have ended the year with a deficit of $134,278 after once again committing a portion of our reserves to strategic development.

Assets	$1,052,493
Liabilities	$699,255
Accumulated Funds	$353,238

2025/26 FY	
Revenue	$1,217,561
Expenses	$1,351,839
Deficit	$134,278



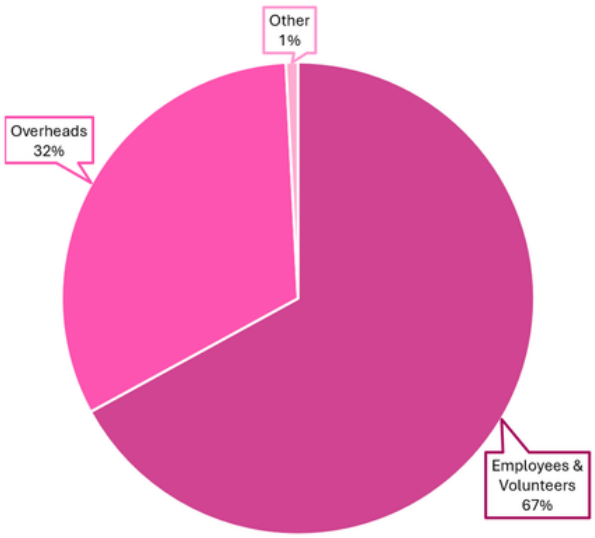
Revenue

Our main source of funding is the Ministry of Justice, who contracts YouthLaw to provide free legal services for young people across the motu. As well as our service delivery funding, we received additional funding to mitigate the increasing cost of living and to maintain equitable wages for our staff.

The bank donation funding we receive comes from interest earned on lawyers' trade accounts. This funding fluctuates based on interest rates, so our bank donation funding has decreased over the past two years.

We received generous grants from the Michael and Suzanne Borrin Foundation, and Wayne Francis Charitable Trust to roll out the Waha programme, and funding from CLCA to pilot our Kaupapa Māori Legal Service.

The remainder of our funding came from public donations and interest on term deposits.



Expenses

The majority of YouthLaw's expenses go towards our staff and volunteers. We have grown our team to manage projects like Waha and to build capacity for service delivery, including our Kaupapa Māori Legal Service.

Overheads include rent, power, accounting, IT, insurance, communications, travel, and various other costs.

Other costs account for all other expenses, such as bank fees and depreciation.

Acknowledgements

YouthLaw Aotearoa wishes to thank the many organisations and individuals who have provided their kind support and invaluable assistance to our ongoing achievements and success.

In particular we are grateful to our funders for enabling the work we do:

ASB, ANZ, BNZ, Westpac and TSB
Auckland Airport Community Trust
Foundation North
The Ministry of Justice
The Michael and Suzanne Borrin Foundation
Wayne Francis

We would also like to thank the following organisations:

Aotearoa Social Studies Educators' Network
Amnesty International
Ara Taiohi
AUT University Law School
Barnardos
BetterCo Accountants
Chapman Tripp
Children's Rights Alliance Aotearoa
Community Law Centres Aotearoa
Community Law Centres nationwide
Curative agency
Electoral Commission
Expert IT
Kick Back and The Front Door
Laidlaw Law & Consultancy
Make it 16
Manukau Jobs and Skills Hub
Mana Inc
Mana Mokopuna
Mana Taiohi
MinterEllisonRuddWatts
The Ministry of Education
The Malosi Project
Nils Accounting & Audit
NZ Law Society
NZ Law Society Youth Justice Committee
Office of the Chief Justice
Office of the Privacy Commissioner
Office of Parliamentary Service
Pillars Ka Pou Whakahou
Praxis
Te Ara Ture
Te Ngahere
Thomson Reuters
Save the Children
South Auckland Youth Network
University of Auckland Law School
VOYCE Whakarongo mai
VXT

As well as these individuals:

Courtney Abernethy
Jackson Atutahi
Louella Billington
Katarena Bisset
Denham Bramwell
Aimee Bryant
Christine Cammell
Danielle Dakanay
Darlene Evans
Anahera Gildea
Deborah Godsmark
Moira Hintz
Liz Kennedy
Briar Kingston
Maiava Leitu Samaseia
Wi Pere Mita
Maddison Morell
Prisca Mudwanga
Ruby Papalii-Curtin
Taitosauawilliam Peace
Aaliyah Peterson-Tamakehu
Kelly Peterson-Teariki
Maria Perreau
Simulata Pope
Juliann Purea-Desai
Marlene Raumati
Matt Renata
Chillion Sanerivi
Elijah Tiatia
Harry Toleafoa
Matakorama Waipouri
Matt Zhang

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